

# Wisconsin Farm to School

Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

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## Success story: Manitowoc County

### Ensuring a Seat for Local Producers at the Farm to School Table

Integrating producers into the farm to school fabric is an essential part of developing a comprehensive farm to school program. Core farm to school concepts such as **local**, **fresh**, **healthy** and **community** come alive for students through interactions with the farmers whose hands grew the food on their cafeteria tray. The greater school community, from food service staff to administrators, can also better appreciate the abundance of reasons to support local agriculture after personally interacting with and learning from producers.

As such, in their quest to build a sustainable farm to school program in Manitowoc County, Cath Pape and Patricia Sampe knew that producers needed a prominent seat at the table. Pape, grant coordinator for the local coalition Healthiest Manitowoc County, and Sampe, a public health nurse that has been working on farm to school initiatives for half a decade, recognized that direct local food procurement, producer visits to classrooms, farm field

trips, and Harvest of the Month activities are all rooted in a rich relationship with local farmers. Accordingly, the farm to school team identified challenges producers may face when working with schools and developed two priority areas to help ensure a smooth and fruitful relationship between the two partners.

The first priority was to develop a common language between producers and school-based professions, since each occupation faces unique operational constraints and employs a vocabulary specific to their field. These differences can sometimes impede communication between potential partners, because neither party knows where or how to start the conversation. The second major goal was to establish a diverse local market for producers so that farm to school procurement would be supported by a general high demand for local food in the community, thereby making local sales a viable opportunity for area producers.



Equipped with the above goals, the farm to school team set out to unite producers with school partners. Pape and Sampe began the process of relationship-building by coordinating a meet and greet event for Manitowoc County producers and food service staff. The Farm to School Mixer, which was supported by Transform Wisconsin grant funding, was held on a brisk evening in November, when farm work had slowed down and school food service was in the routine of the school year.

The event, which was attended by over 40 producers and food service staff, began with a formal introduction to farm to school. The evening was then opened up for informal conversations and networking, yielding at least one purchasing agreement between Manitowoc Public School District and Heritage Orchards for deliveries of 20 cases of apples a week, October through February, for over 5100 students.



The Farm to School Mixer successfully established an entry point for producers in school food procurement, so the focus now shifted to strengthening producer relationships with the rest of the school community. With encouragement from the farm to school team, teachers invited farmers to visit their classrooms to talk about the history and details of their farm operations. Producers hosted farm tours for students on class field trips. One farmer, Nancy Kellner of Kellner's Back Acre Garden, taught a full academic year's worth of Harvest of the Month lessons to the after-school program at Jefferson Elementary of Manitowoc Public Schools.

Through the support of Transform Wisconsin grant funding, Kellner was able to provide products from her farm for the Harvest of the Month fruit or vegetable feature each month.

Just one year after holding the first meet and greet event for producers and food service directors, a number of robust producer-school relationships had formed. To involve even more local producers, as well as school administration and staff, Sampe and Pape planned a second meet and greet event "to bring people together again, provide inspiration, and

capitalize on the great momentum,” says Pape. This gathering, known as the “CHEW”, was held one year later on another November evening and included a 100% locally sourced dinner.



Many of the attending producers donated meat, vegetables and fruit for the meal and the Two Rivers Public Schools Food Service Director, Paula Erickson, prepared the supper with her staff. Producers, food service staff and school district administrators were assigned to seats that mixed the professions. The Heritage Orchards and Manitowoc Public Schools apple procurement story was presented as a model for how simple it can be

to purchase local, whole produce. In addition, all of the producers at the event introduced themselves, their mission and the history of their respective farms. At least two new procurement connections were formed as a direct result of the CHEW.

Also stemming from the CHEW was an idea to increase the community presence of local farmers by holding a “Meet Your Local Producer” event, which was designed to feature farmers and their products, not unlike a farmers market. All goals and expectations were far exceeded. Over 200 people attended the evening event and excellent sales were reported by most of the 17 local vendors. Producers, who were provided with fuel cards through the support of grant funding, were amazed at the community enthusiasm for local products.



Growers immediately asked to make “Meet Your Local Producer” a weekly or monthly event in the winter months. Pape remarks that “to be able to provide public relations for these farms has really been the key for producers to work with us,” for it has provided an inter-connected and robust local food market for farmers.



Farmers in Manitowoc County are now firmly seated at the farm to school table. Procurement transactions and producer-school activities now fill the space that was once occupied by communications barriers between the two partners. Furthermore, there is a strong community-based desire to re-connect with local food. Area businesses are showing a preference for purchasing meals from restaurants that locally source their produce, a local hospital welcomes a farmer to sell at a small on-site market for hospital employees, and an assisted

living facility is looking for ways to involve their community in the local food movement. By increasing market opportunities for producers and fostering a strong appreciation for local agriculture, Manitowoc County is working hard to achieve a robust and resilient community food system that includes farm to school.

## New Resources

### [Wisconsin School Garden Initiative Newsletter](#)

Here is the first 2015 newsletter from WSGI - this one is full of resources about garden planning with kids.

### **Wisconsin Farm to School Summit**

Wisconsin Farm to School partners are excited to announce the third Wisconsin Farm to School Summit scheduled for January 29, 2015 at Hotel Mead in Wisconsin Rapids. Summit participants will be "Digging In" to beginning and advanced farm to school topics, including: local procurement, food safety, culinary skills, school gardens, farm to preschool, and farm to college. This conference is different than most, featuring a full day of interactive and hands-on activities and networking sessions to expand your knowledge and support for your program. Participants will select one afternoon workshop where they will spend three hours enhancing their farm to school skill set with the most experienced staff our state has to offer. Also, we are thrilled to welcome Deborah Kane, National Director of the USDA Farm to School Program, as the keynote speaker for the conference. Learn more about the Wisconsin Farm to School Summit [here](#).



## Webinars, Conferences and Events

### [Outdoor Classroom Management](#)

January 15, 4 p.m. EST - Hosted by edWeb

Along with abundant opportunities for learning and fun, outdoor classrooms come with a

unique set of challenges, particularly in relation to classroom management. How do I focus students' attention on the lesson when the squirrels are dropping walnuts from the tree? How do I convince 30 students that the garden is a learning environment and not a space for extra recess time? Whitney Cohen, Life Lab's Education Director, will use stories, photos and discussion to share tried-and-true tips for managing large groups of students in an outdoor environment.

### **Upcoming USDA 11-Part Webinar Series**

The USDA is launching a **\*new upcoming 11-part webinar series\*** starting on January 15 at 2 pm ET. For more information about this series, please visit <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/videos-and-webinars>.



### **What's in Store for the USDA Farm to School Program in 2015?**

Chat with Deborah Kane, National Director of USDA's Farm to School Program

Event details: Tuesday, January 20th at 2:00 pm EST.

Wondering what's happening with the next Farm to School Census or what new resources the USDA Farm to School Program will be developing in 2015? Connect with Deborah Kane in the first of what we expect to be a regular opportunity to learn more about the USDA Farm to School Program's activities. Can't join us live? The event will be recorded and available on our [website](#). [Sign up here!](#)

### **Telling your story: Share your success with the media, the community and funders**

February 10, 1 p.m. EST

Your school garden is growing, your lunch line is local, and your community's health and economy are improving thanks to farm to school. But if you don't learn how to tell your story in a concise, compelling way, interest in your program could stagnate. Maintain momentum for farm to school within your community through media relations, funder outreach and community partners with persuasive success stories. The National Farm to School Network's communications staff, Chelsey Simpson and Stacey Malstrom, will offer simple best-practices and easy tips for sharing your story and finding your audience. The 20-minute presentation will be followed by a Q&A session.

### **Free Training from NFSMI Coming in 2015**

The National Food Service Management Institute is offering free face-to-face training sessions in Oxford, Mississippi for 2015. Keep the [calendar](#) handy and plan your training session soon. Trainings at the NFSMI headquarters in Mississippi are only one of the many options for taking advantage of NFSMI training. If you are unable to attend a training in person at NFSMI, please consider the free online courses: Visit the NFSMI website at [www.nfsmi.org](http://www.nfsmi.org) and click on the tab for NFSMI's Online Courses page ([www.nfsmi.org/OnlineCourses](http://www.nfsmi.org/OnlineCourses)) for more information.



# Farm to School Funding Opportunities



## Smarter Lunchrooms sub-grant

Wisconsin Team Nutrition is still accepting applications for sub-grants of up to \$500 to schools interested in implementing small changes to create lunchrooms that improve student eating behaviors.

The grant application and instructions are available at:

[http://ne.dpi.wi.gov/ne\\_tngrant](http://ne.dpi.wi.gov/ne_tngrant). Applications must be postmarked or received (faxed, emailed) by Friday, January 23, 2015.

Interested in learning more about Smarter Lunchrooms? Access promotional videos, Smarter Lunchrooms in a Flash training webinars, and materials to assess your current lunchroom environment [here](#).

## Crowdfunding for Green School Initiatives

The nation-wide, nonprofit crowdfunding platform [ioby](#) is offering a special 'match funding' opportunity to schools that are starting an environmental project for the very first time. Eligible projects can be anywhere in the US, and must run a crowdfunding campaign with a goal of \$1000 or less, in early 2015. Thanks to the support of the Johnson Ohana Charitable Foundation, donations to Green Schools campaigns will be doubled, up to \$500 per campaign.



## Lowe's Toolbox for Education Program

DEADLINE: February 13, 2015

Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation is looking to award \$5,000 to as many as 1,000 schools this year. Grants are available to both educators and parent groups with project ideas to enhance their school or community.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, contact DATCP's Sarah Elliott at 608-224-5046 or [sarah.elliott@wisconsin.gov](mailto:sarah.elliott@wisconsin.gov).